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# H. R. FOX BOURNE

A

MEMORIAL DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE

ON

SUNDAY, 28TH FEBRUARY, 1909

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON, M.P.





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I DO not know what truth there may be in the saying that "the world knows little of its greatest men," but I am sure that the world knows little of its best men, and almost as little of the men who do some of the best public work done in their day. I suppose most people who to-day know the name of Henry Richard Fox Bourne, and and have read notices of his death, knew him mainly as Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society. It is possible that some of an older generation may remember him as the writer of such a book as 'The Romance of Trade,' and a smaller number still will remember him by the books he produced long anterior to 1871. But to the general public he was, in the common sense of the word, unknown. Amongst journalists, only those in London would associate a literary career with his name and personality. The general reader, outside of the press, would know little more than his name in connection with a few books that once had considerable popularity, but which, as a rule, would not be called memorable, however thoroughly well written in their way.

And yet this little-known man was the author of two works which should have won for him anywhere in the English-speaking world the status of a valuable man of letters. I allude to his *Life of John Locke* and his memoir of Sir Philip Sidney. And I say without hesitation, that had either of those books been the work of a Frenchman, and been written in French, the author would probably have won the distinction of being crowned by the Academy. His work would there have won him a literary status for his whole life. I might even say that the author of 'English Newspapers' would, in any other country than his own, have been recognised as the author of a book of most valuable research, particularly instructive and interesting to all connected with the newspaper industry and literature. But even the authorship of that toilsome and helpful research did not win for Mr. Fox Bourne anything like newspaper notoriety. And the writing of these books, three solid and serious works (that on Locke particularly so), was only

a series of episodes in a life that was otherwise packed with constant beneficent activity. The lesser activities in which he engaged—I mean activities less calculated to secure prominence for his name—constituted in themselves a great work.

Let me give a brief outline of Mr. Bourne's career for the benefit of those who only knew him indirectly as an author or philanthropic worker. He was born on Christmas Eve, 1837, so that when he died a few weeks ago he would be some seventy-one years of age. He was the son of Stephen Bourne, a man still recollected by a small circle as one of the most eminent advanced political thinkers of his generation. Henry Richard Fox Bourne was born in the island of Jamaica, where his father was then domiciled. When he was four years old he was removed to British Guiana, where he lived until he was eleven. Then the family returned to London, where his serious education began in a private school. From his stay in Jamaica and British Guiana perhaps dates that interest in the coloured races which in later life led to his long and unwavering devotion of his time to the cause of native races in all parts of the world. His education was continued at a private school in London. At the age of eighteen he gained a position in a Government office, and it is for me, in the retrospect, somewhat amusing to note that one whose whole bent and ideal were in the direction of the promotion of peace on earth should have begun his public function in connection with the Office of War. While at the War Office he still carried on assiduously the work of self culture. He matriculated at London University in 1856. He was a student at King's College, and he also attended the City of London College, meeting there Sir Edward Clarke, with whom he remained on friendly terms to the end of his life. And with the City of London College Fox Bourne was associated as honorary examiner until his death. An influence that seems to have had great weight with young Fox Bourne was that of Professor Henry Morley, the historian of English literature, and the well-known editor of so many reprints of popular classics. Fox Bourne attended the professor's lectures on history and literature. He became closely associated with him, and was one of his most intimate friends during the professor's life. Fox Bourne seems to have been in some sense Professor Henry Morley's assistant, and no doubt there arose in that connection that love of the study of literature and history which was to find its expression in the 'Life of Sir Philip Sidney,' and the 'Life of John Locke.' It was under Morley's editorship of *The Examiner* that



Fox Bourne began his career as a working journalist, and it is interesting to note that the first paper he produced appeared in Charles Dickens's *Household Words*. Thus we find Fox Bourne an industrious producer of intellectual work in the fifties, a generation the greater part of which has passed away. And it is because so many of those who knew him best, and welcomed his literary work when it came forth, have passed away, that there are so few of us to-day to do honour to his memory.

Mr. Fox Bourne produced his 'Life of Sidney' in 1862; in 1866, 'English Merchants'; in 1868, 'English Seamen under the Tudors'; in the same year, 'Famous London Merchants'; in 1869, 'The Story of our Colonies,' and the 'Life of Cochrane,' written in collaboration with Lord Dundonald, Lord Cochrane's descendant. In 1871 he issued 'The Romance of Trade,' which is, perhaps, more widely known than those other books of Mr. Bourne in connection with the history of English commerce. This work was done while he was yet a clerk in the War Office, and the fact that so much work—so much solid thoroughly sound compilation—could be done by a clerk in that office, makes it quite easy to understand that about that time it began to be perceived by those in high places that the War Office staff might reasonably be reduced. There were other able men who were similarly employed in mere clerical work. These men received considerable and steadily increasing salaries, and were entitled to pensions. The authorities considered that the work could be done by cheaper men, and hence gave some of them the option of relinquishing their prospects in return for a sum of money.

Mr. Fox Bourne was one of them; and I think it is a matter of congratulation to his friends and admirers that he was released from official connection with a Government Department, and from, let us say, an amount of inferior employment that must sometimes have been associated with even a fairly light office of that kind. That took place in 1870, when he took over *The Examiner* journal to which he had been so long a contributor. That journal, which had Professor Henry Morley for its previous editor, had a most interesting history. If I remember rightly, George Henry Lewes was one of its early contributors, and Herbert Spencer was associated with it; and at all times down to the period of its extinction it had a reputation for holding up the intellectual side of political thought, dealing with English affairs in a spirit of enlightenment, and appealing in its columns to cultured people, which,

of course, is another way of saying that it did not pay. The whole sum awarded to him as compensation for the abolition of his post in the War Office was spent on *The Examiner*, which he ably edited for about two years.

In that position he did a good man's work, and many a man of good average capacity—more than average capacity—would be satisfied to let the doing of such work constitute his service to his generation. But Fox Bourne was not a producer of that kind. In 1876 we find him bringing out his monumental 'Life of John Locke,' which once for all superseded the previous biographies by King and others, a book that embraces as thoroughly as possible all that is known or is important to be known of Locke's life and work, and his relations to his contemporaries, alike on the philosophical and political side, and yet Mr. Fox Bourne could carry on his interest in English commerce and its developments, for we find him producing in 1877 his papers on 'Foreign Rivalries in Industrial Products,' for Cassell's "Great Industries of Great Britain."

The history of trade, as related by Mr. Fox Bourne, starting with 'English Merchants,' and continuing in 'English Seamen under the Tudors,' and that remarkable "Romance" will well repay perusal by all who are not experts, and even experts who read these books may derive profit from them; for Mr. Fox Bourne made himself an expert in every subject he handled, and his memoir of Sir Philip Sidney is admitted to be the one book on that famous figure in Elizabethan history. The book is marked by a wonderful thoroughness both on the literary and the philosophical side. He examined, sifted, and judged the literary work of Sidney, no less than his public career. He read completely—which probably nobody now in this building has done—Sir Philip Sidney's 'Arcadia,' and concisely told his readers all about it. The thoroughness of his literary work, the insight, the soundness of critical judgment he displays, show that had he chosen to be merely a man of letters he could have been one of the most accomplished and useful of his day.

Having all that work behind him, on the cessation of *The Examiner*—which was too good a journal ever to repay its proprietor—we find him going in 1878 to Malta in the capacity of secretary to Sir Penrose Julian, who was deputed to conduct a Colonial Office inquiry into the civil service of the island. Mr. Fox Bourne began to be associated with the then popular journal, *The Weekly Dispatch*, in



1876, and, after his return from Malta, he edited it for three or four or more years.

Some of you here this morning will remember *The Weekly Dispatch* under his editorship ; how sound, how useful, how judicious in political judgments it always was. Worth reprinting at this time is a pamphlet issued in 1881 on the House of Lords which reproduces a series of his articles in *The Dispatch*. We shall there find the whole case as regards the House of Lords argued as thoroughly and temperately and as convincingly as by any one in more recent years. And still, notwithstanding all these activities, Mr. Fox Bourne contrived to see more of the world. We find him in the early eighties going touring in Canada, and enlarging by actual contact his knowledge of the Empire in that region.

In 1889, finally, in succession to Mr. Chesson, he became secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, assuming the office with which he has been to most of us peculiarly associated during the past twenty years, and which, I have no hesitation in saying, no man now alive is qualified to fill as he filled it. Mr. Fox Bourne's knowledge of the problems of what we loosely call "the native races" was unrivalled in every respect. There are members of Parliament who have taken even prominent positions in the work of protecting the interests of aborigines, who will admit that it was to Mr. Fox Bourne they looked for most of their information, and from him that they received, whenever they needed it, their instruction. He knew and could usefully and exactly recite the interferences with native races in all parts of the British Empire that had taken place for generations past. He knew what experiments had been made, what applications had been made of high ideals to the solution of native problems, by earlier politicians, and nearly forgotten by later politicians. He knew where good intentions had failed ; he knew where blindness, egoism, selfishness, had triumphed, as indeed is the rule, over any aspirations of philanthropy or of what Imperialists would call sentimentalism. And there was in his character a singular combination of the keenest insight, the strongest, shrewdest, critical capacity with an absolutely imperturbable sweetness of disposition. I do not remember in my whole intercourse with him on such matters—and we met frequently to discuss odious deeds and lamentably selfish tendencies on the part of our contemporaries—I never heard a word from him that could be said to bear the slightest taint of vindictiveness. When he described something at which his

whole soul revolted, he still described it without any violence of speech.

He possessed a singularly keen insight into human failings. Seeing politicians in sidelights all his life, seeing the way in which the desire for personal distinction shades into or shades out of a mere disinterested concern for the well-being of mankind, I fear he did not have a very high opinion of the moral qualifications or ideals of most men who came into practical connexion with the problems of handling native races. The fact is that there are very few men capable of his own absolutely disinterested concern for the protection of people who cannot protect themselves. All men in the presence of wrong-doing are capable of momentary sympathy with its victims, unless they happen to be of that type or particular brand of men whose whole relation towards backward or coloured races is a capacity of contempt or a desire for extermination. There are such men. Pseudo-scientific men have even formulated a doctrine to this effect: that the backward races ought to disappear before the white and leave the world to the unchecked expansion of the magnificent qualities of the white races. Apart from these men, who contemplate the extermination of races they are pleased to call "lower," or of the men who come into contact with the native races whom they wish to despoil in order that they may enrich themselves at their expense, people do respond sympathetically when an appeal for protection is made on behalf of the victims of wrong and cruelty. We see such a response made in our own day in the case of the crimes and atrocities wrought against the natives in the Congo Free State—that State entrusted to the care of the King of the Belgians in the name of Christianity and civilization! It is not generally known that it was Fox Bourne who first brought the history of that wrong-doing to the notice of the world. The movement was taken up by other hands, but it was Fox Bourne who first gave the world a general knowledge of the facts of the case. Well, the average good citizen will respond when he is appealed to about the atrocities in Congoland; and thousands attend public meetings and even call upon the Government to interfere in the Congo Free State in the interests of civilisation. But even at these meetings there are some who think mostly of the possible spread of the English language and development of English trade in Congoland, and no appeals could get the same audiences to listen to the wrongs of natives in any section of the British Empire. It is the wrongs of "other people's niggers" that arouse their



indignation. Fox Bourne was not thus limited in his sympathies. For over twenty years he has in his writings directed attention to native labour problems in South, East, and West Africa, and, as secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society for that period, he has made it his business to know and let the public know the wrongs of the native races everywhere, appealing to his countrymen for moral intervention when necessary. This many-sided man, this man of literary training and various faculty, devoted himself to the simple championship of oppressed races, perpetually putting before the public his warning word and shielding the victims of selfish oppression and tyranny.

What makes Fox Bourne memorable and worthy of the commemoration of his countrymen is that he always looked to the essentials of character, and to the things that are real and valuable in national life. There are some people who are absorbed by one cause, who can give their whole mind and heart to the vindication of some particular grievance, the protection of some wronged person or set of persons, the vindication of the claims of such a race as that of Congoland or any other of the hundred and one races and tribes of this earth; but here was a man capable of living on three or four different planes of mental activity, capable of enjoying life on its literary plane, capable at the same time of historical research; and with all this capacity for other forms of action, he settles down during the last years of his life to the inglorious and little noted function of watching over those races who, in so many parts of the world, are in these latter years suffering wrong, plunder, and oppression at the hands of dominant white races. Only he himself could state the case as it should be stated here this morning; for only he himself knew all the facts and was capable of focussing them in a philosophic way and speaking of them in a thoroughly judicial spirit. He had the faculty of combatting wrong without being embittered by it. He was content in the greater part of his own life's span to be regarded as, what some call a crank, or faddist, or sentimentalist, or little Englander, or to be known by any of the labels with which ignorance and incompetence mark some of the best men of the day.

All who profess to regard political life seriously must admit—must realise—that the handling of this problem of the lower by the higher races is one of the most vital questions of the time, one on which will partly depend the future developments of civilisation. There are men of real scientific training and attainments who look upon the whole

question as we may regard the survival of one species of rat in comparison with another species. That is the strictly scientific view; but the ethical side of the question must not be left out of account, as it is in the question of the disappearance of the black before the brown rat, or *vice versa*. Fox Bourne realised what is going on in this contact of races. He realised the profound demoralisation of the white when he is placed in this attitude of domination towards the black. I know that colonists always resent any suggestion that their ethical plane is any lower than that of the older countries, where people are not in contact with backward or "lower" races. Of course, the colonists can easily point to the vices and corruptions of older and more civilised countries, and they easily make out a case for the view they generally hold: that the colonies are schools of a healthier, nobler, and purer humanity than is to be found in older civilisations. All this, however, is away from the problem. Nobody disputes that men who live on the frontiers of the colonies are less liable to the vicious temptations of older civilisations. That is not the issue. The colonist, frontiersman, pioneer—all who come in contact with lower races not on a legal equality with them—none the less develop a lower ethic in relation to them than men in the older civilizations develop in relation to each other. They may reply that in the older civilizations the difficulty does not arise. Quite so. We here are not brought into contact with the Kaffir, the Zulu, and the rest, and have no right to adopt a Pharisaic tone in judging the conduct of colonists in relation to the black races with whom they are in actual contact. The fact remains that the white race in the colonies is being demoralized, perverted, tainted, by the contact, and by their dominance.

The question arises: is anything to be done by criticism at home, or by the men at home who are supposed to have some control over governmental machinery, to control the dealings of colonists with native races? I suppose—taking a perfectly dispassionate view of the problem—we must all admit that the chances are all in favour of the frontiersmen and colonists being allowed, in the long run, to do as they please. How many are there at home who care enough for either justice and righteousness, on the one hand, or the development of civilization, on the other hand, to concern themselves ethically and politically about the relations of two kinds of races? Hardly anybody. Many men who have had their attention called to the matter through the unsleeping activity of Fox Bourne or of the Aborigines Protection Society would have never noted the problem or meddled with it of their own accord. Fox



Bourne, by patient industry and tenacity of purpose, kept these questions to the front. He issued pamphlets which the general public never saw, but which some men read; and in this way he kept alive, in the conscience of his generation, a problem on which that conscience might be well-nigh dead without it.

I am not at all disposed to say that I look forward hopefully to anything like a satisfactory result of all that wonderful, beneficent, and laudable activity. The interests of selfishness are too strong, the constant appeals to egoism are a much more inexhaustible force than the beneficent sympathies of the world; and my unhopeful view is borne out by the fact that the beneficent activities of Fox Bourne for a generation have received inadequate attention. The very fact that he and his work are to a great extent unknown to this generation may be evidence that his function is passing away, and that the development of our moral life with regard to the problems he so constantly handled is downward rather than upward. I should be more hopeful if I knew of any one in our public life capable of carrying on the work he has begun.

Happily there are men still with us who take a disinterested view of problems of race. The question of the Congo has been taken up with the most praiseworthy activity by a number of Englishmen; and here and there a vigorous protest against the wrong done to some backward and downtrodden community reminds us that the love of justice is far from being extinct. But where is there now among us a man capable of correlating all the facts, keeping his eye on the whole progress of the relations between the higher and lower races, and maintaining a constant propaganda in the interests of justice and righteousness? He has not yet emerged.

It would be with a deep feeling of comfort and satisfaction that we would welcome the rise amongst us of any one capable of continuing the work of Fox Bourne; one, let it be, possessing a moral nature as rare and as fine as his. Looking over the public men whom I have known or been associated with in spheres of public activity, I do not think I can cite one whose nature was more entirely lovable and laudable. A politician, a mutual friend, spoke of him to me recently in these words: "Fox Bourne was one of the gentlest men who ever meddled in public affairs, and yet he was capable of going to the stake for his convictions rather than palter what he felt to be justice in any matter."

It was not only wrong-doing by foreigners in contact with native races that he condemned, but wrong-doing on the part of his own countrymen. I am not suggesting that what has happened in Natal, for instance, is to be compared with the cold-blooded cruelty of the Belgian administration in the Congo. The atrocious employment of cannibal soldiers to enforce labour on the part of natives who have the right to live their own life in their own way, has justly aroused the indignation of England. But do the people of England realize that in Natal there has been going on for years a certain political process which has for its object simply the appropriation of the land of the Zulus? If, like Mr. Fox Bourne, they realised this, if they realised the wrongs of that kind done by our own race under the flag of our own Empire, they would be a little more ready to intervene for the prevention of plunder and crime.

One of the recent activities of his life was the protest he made against the shocking mismanagement of the cocoa plantations in the Portuguese island of San Thomé whence comes a great deal of the best cocoa supply of the world. Mr. Nevinson has investigated this particular matter and has written a most moving book upon it. Fox Bourne, who also wrote on the subject, associated himself with Mr. Nevinson in condemnation and exposure of the wrong that is being done, and the mismanagement that prevails. This was a peculiarly difficult matter for him, for connected with the cocoa trade are some of the most esteemed English philanthropists, men whose real and genuine service to philanthropy is beyond all challenge. Such men as these found themselves in a very embarrassing relation to the misgovernment that was going on at San Thomé. The fact that Fox Bourne was long associated with such men made no difference to him, and never checked his activity against this wrong-doing. He went on exposing the evil with the same determination that he brought to bear in the exposure of every other wrong done to native races. To him will be due the credit more than to any other man, except Mr. Nevinson, if the atrocious conditions of the existence of natives employed at San Thomé are mitigated, as we are in hopes that they will be.

It was not exclusively with the sufferings and wrongs of the lowest and most backward races that Mr. Fox Bourne was concerned. He was a sympathiser with the claims or struggles of other races, like the Indians and Egyptians, for their liberties. He was as much interested in all these movements as he was in the wrongs of the most backward



and the lowliest of aborigines. A very considerable part of his work during the last three or four years of his life consisted in writing out in detail a series of his exact, remarkable, and trustworthy statements, setting forth the position of affairs in Egypt under what is practically British rule. Here again he took upon himself a thankless task. If you want to excite English enthusiasm about Egypt, the proper course is to declaim about the splendid benefits we have conferred on the natives, or to tell how much has been done by irrigation, and to say nothing about the time when, during our naval warfare with France, we let the sea in to inundate cultivated land, inflicting destruction which has not been remedied to this day. You must speak of the beneficent control over a corrupt race exercised by Lord Cromer, and how much he has done for the population of Egypt, and you must omit to say that it was primarily done in the interest of Egyptian bondholders. You should speak of the substitution of English justice and English administration for the lax and corrupt methods that previously obtained, and you should hint more or less plainly—as I notice one recent writer has done—that it is now almost the duty of the English people to take over Egypt bodily. That idea has been long dangled before the eyes of English people, and there is reason to believe that it was in contemplation, in the management of Egyptian affairs, some years before the country passed from the control of Lord Cromer. I saw not many months ago, in a publisher's circular advertising a work issued on Egypt, the hardy assertion that "Egypt is a splendid heritage for England." We are invited to play the old part of land-grabber, and, having one foot already in Egypt, to put the other foot also. That is the sort of propaganda that is popular. When a man writes a book on those lines he is sure to receive laudatory attention from the press and from a number of politicians. But Fox Bourne sat down to show what was actually going on, to describe the existing misgovernment, to show that such misgovernment was inseparable from the system—a system that completely denied self-government to the native race. When he set forth all this in a series of six able and exhaustive pamphlets, he took a course which was not the way to secure recognition in our day and generation. What he has done is to put in the hands of all who care to know the facts, who are concerned for righteousness under British rule, the true statement of the case. England has not yet realised the scientific truth that the domination of one race over another is always injurious to both. It not only harms

and paralyzes the weak, but it is bound to react injuriously on the dominant race.

Looking back upon Fox Bourne's unceasing activity the thought arises that this man, more than almost any man in his day, fully and admirably lived his life. It was a life of thought, of literature, of propaganda, and of research ; a life of public activity, controlling and stimulating the activities of others ; associated with great causes like the peace movement in all parts of the world ; for with all his special occupations we constantly find him joining in peace, and other, conferences abroad, using his influence as an expert, journalist, or publicist for progress, civilization, and benevolence. He has shown us how to live : how life may be lived : how in these days, amid the problems and developments of public life, it is possible to be one's self calmly poised ; never lapsing into cynicism, or into despair, constantly active, constantly doing good, exhibiting to the race of men the possibilities that are still open to intelligence combined with goodness of character.



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